

**Grant Report: New England Yearly Meeting ARCH Project**

September 2023

Submitted by: NiaDwynwen Thomas, NEYM Program Director

**1. What problem were you addressing? What solution did you propose to address it?**

Many Quaker Meetings in our region struggle to know how to respond to their aging membership, and to the collective and individual impacts of aging. Older Friends, local meeting leadership, and pastoral caregivers often find themselves overwhelmed by the challenges and changes that aging brings. For Quaker meetings, families, and individuals, aging can feel both scary and stressful rather than what it is: a natural part of the human lifespan, with unique spiritual opportunities.

In order to meaningfully engage New England Friends around aging, we are now almost one year into the experiment of expanding and adapting New York Yearly Meeting's Aging Resources Consultation and Help (ARCH) Program for New England Friends. ARCH's approach is aligned with our own sense of best practice: inviting communities as a whole (rather than only individuals) into mutual accompaniment and a better understanding of the aging journey, lifting up the powerful ways God continues to work through us as we age and as we more fully live into the possibility of multigenerational community.

**2. What actions did you take? What worked and didn't work toward your objectives?**

**Please share any unanticipated benefits or barriers encountered.**

After Patti Muldoon, our ARCH Coordinator, began her service in mid-October, our first objective was to make New England Friends aware of what ARCH is and to invite them into conversation with Patti about the ways that aging-related issues and experiences are currently showing up in our life together as Friends, using these conversations to inform our priorities. This outreach and listening took the form of regular contributions to our monthly e-newsletter, regular announcements during our monthly Zoom calls with meeting leaders, one-to-one email and phone correspondence, and Patti's in-person presence and lunch-table conversations at Yearly Meeting events. In addition, Patti was invited to and visited three local meetings and has plans to visit two additional quarterly meetings this fall.

Following this, our next objective was to offer programming at the intersection of Patti's strengths and New England Friends' needs. Throughout her service, Patti has facilitated monthly End-of-Life Reflection Groups. This offering began with Patti facilitating two closed groups and has now evolved into a single opportunity offered on a drop-in basis, averaging about twelve participants per month and yielding extremely positive feedback. This spring, we used our communications channels to invite New England Friends to participate in the ARCH Foundations workshop and were pleased that Friends from seven New England meetings opted into this three-part commitment. At NEYM's Annual Sessions this summer, Patti co-facilitated three workshops: one on end-of-life conversations, one on the experiences of caregivers, and one on mutual accompaniment along the aging journey. We were delighted that amid all the competing offerings at Sessions, participants opted to join all these workshops, engaging fully and bringing not only questions but wisdom to share. Throughout these endeavors, it has been a delight to discover much that has "worked." Such elements include:

- Paying attention and responding to not only the condition of individuals but also the collective condition within our local meetings
- Focusing on inviting workshop participants to draw from the wisdom of their own experiences and share deeply with one another
- Participating in the circle of practice offered to ARCH Coordinators, skillfully facilitated by the ARCH Director
- Continuing to reflect on and grow in our understanding of how and when ARCH programmatic opportunities happening in NYYM can be a resource to New England Friends
- Drawing from existing high-quality resources, such as Pendle Hill Pamphlets on aging and end-of-life, rather than reinventing the wheel
- Lifting up Friends with gifts of facilitation, serving as co-facilitators alongside our Patti, who is herself a very experienced facilitator.
- Designing workshops and reflection groups to center mutual support and wisdom-sharing
- Inviting program participants to move from their heads to their hearts with the aid of silence and music

- Maintaining ongoing dialogue between the ARCH Coordinator, Program Director, and those in our Yearly Meeting tending directly to and caring for the condition of local meetings as a whole, such as the Meeting Accompaniment Group
- Growing a sense of our sub-audiences (such as pastoral care committees, memorial committees, burial committees); understanding their specific needs, drawing on their wisdom

Despite these many affirmations of our efforts, we did encounter some barriers and discover some places where adjustments are needed:

- We need to continue the conversation with the ARCH Director about what role the ARCH Foundations workshop should play for New England Friends. NYYM has been using a model where Foundations is the gateway into other involvement with ARCH. This approach seems to not translate well to New England Friends who have less familiarity with ARCH as a distinct ministry separate from the wider Yearly Meeting. We sense some New England Friends wouldn't be interested in a general three-part workshop but would be interested in a workshop, consultation, or interest group focused on a specific aging-related topic of interest to them which incorporates elements of ARCH's overall approach.
- The ARCH Director, NEYM Program Director, and NEYM ARCH Coordinator need to meet more frequently as a group of three. In particular, these conversations can aid us in identifying upcoming and emerging ARCH programmatic offerings that may be of interest to New England Friends in order to allow for a sufficient outreach timeline.
- As Patti began her service, she focused on offering programs that center her area of expertise, end-of-life. Going forward, we will expand our focus to other aging related topics, drawing from the expertise of other New England Friends as well as other ARCH Coordinators in NYYM.
- We need to use sign-in sheets for in-person workshops that do not require pre-registration (such as at Sessions) so that we can ask participants to submit evaluations and keep them informed of future opportunities.

**3. How did you measure success—both quantitative and qualitative? What did you learn?**  
**Please include numbers and demographics of people touched by the work.**

Numbers we are paying attention to (quantitative data):

- The number of participants in workshops and reflection groups.
  - Workshops: ARCH Foundations (10 New Englanders), Challenging Conversations (6), Caregiving Blessings and Challenges (6), Ourselves Home (10)
  - End of Life Interest/Reflection Groups: 45 registrants
- The number of New England Meetings and worship groups that participants in ARCH opportunities come from (as well as what those meetings are):
  - Interest/Reflection Groups: 18 local meetings in New England (in addition to participants from four other Yearly Meetings). New England meetings served by these groups: Beacon Hill (MA), Cambridge (MA), Dover (NH), East Sandwich (MA), Hanover (NH), Framingham (MA), Mt. Toby (MA), New Haven (CT), New London (CT), Northampton (MA), North Shore (MA), Providence (RI), Portland (ME), Putney (VT), Storrs (CT), Wellesley (MA), Westerly (RI), Worcester (MA)
- The one-to-five star ratings from participants after each Interest or Reflection Group session
  - We are close to a 50% response rate with these ratings. The lowest-rated session averaged 4 stars, the highest-rated session rated 4.7 stars, and the sessions overall rate 4.4 stars.
- The number of visits to local meetings (three so far, two more planned for fall; one more may be on its way, as one anonymous Sessions participant shared on their evaluation that they would be passing on the suggestion that Patti visit their meeting and quarter)
- The ways that participants find out about our offerings.
  - For the end-of-life Reflection Groups, fewer than half of participants responded but of those who did, 71% found out via NEYM's monthly newsletter and 29% via NEYM's monthly calls for those serving their local meeting, which encourages participants to directly connect other Friends in their home meetings with opportunities which may interest them.

- This year we also made an initial attempt to gather quantitative data on how (or if) participants' connection to their Quaker community, accompaniment with other Friends, and experience of aging as coming with spiritual opportunities shifted following participation in ARCH programs. Unfortunately, the response rate to these longer feedback forms was too low to yield statistically significant results. Going forward, we will continue to invite these reflections, but likely need to take a more open-ended and conversational approach.

Things that are harder to count that we've been paying attention to (qualitative data):

- Open-ended responses on participant evaluations and feedback forms. Highlights include:
  - One participant reported that Patti's workshop was the "most meaningful" aspect of Sessions for them saying it was "very rich and deep."
  - From the Interest/Reflection Groups: *all around excellent: themes, prompts, discussion in my breakout group, Patti's expertise and compassion ... Thank you for doing this. It is a wise and engaging group ... Excited to continue discussion and delving into this important and challenging topic ... Patti skillfully and compassionately facilitated ... Really good discussion. Very open and real.*
- Eagerness of Friends to talk about ARCH/aging at mealtimes during Yearly Meeting events:
  - Since being hired, at every meal Patti has been at during Yearly Meeting events, people came up to her wanting to sit and discuss ARCH related issues. There is clearly a desire to discuss aging concerns within a Quaker context.

#### **4. Include a budget and actual for the project during the reporting period.**

See page 7.

#### **5. What conversations have you had on how to sustain the project after the grant, and do you have plans to share your results with other organizations?**

At this stage of exploration, conversations about the longer-term funding of ARCH specifically are just beginning. Overall conversations about the future of NEYM's programs and the development efforts necessary to sustain our vision are in full swing. Cultivating sustaining

partnerships with other organizations is a key focus of NEYM's program strategy right now. In addition, NEYM has recently made a big step towards facilitating generative dialogue between local meetings and NEYM program staff and having the dialogue inform NEYM's funding priorities/budget via an annual [\*Meeting for Listening\*](#).

In terms of sharing about our ongoing learning with other organizations, the Program Director and ARCH Coordinator plan to continue to participate in FFA's Aging Convening Conversations. The Program Director participates in regular conversations with Friends from a number of yearly meetings about the end-of-life of Friends meetings, including how that work connects to Friends' overall orientation towards aging and death. The Program Director also serves as a member of the new Quaker Leadership Center's Advisory Council, an opportunity for leaders from across the branches of Quakerism to share about and respond to the challenges and possibilities before us now.

**6. Feedback on your interaction with FFA would be helpful. How have we helped? Made it harder? What else can we do to facilitate your work?**

FFA has been wonderful to work with. I (Nia) have found the mid-cycle conversations to be energizing and clarifying and have found your approach to reporting immensely practical. Thank you for continuing to be available for ongoing conversation and for connection-making. I hope the Convening sessions can continue to be a circle of practice where we can learn from the wisdom of other Quaker organizations serving around similar concerns.

### Budget and Actuals for 2022-2023 NEYM ARCH Project\*

Item	Notes	Estimate	Actuals*
New England Coordinator wages	Pay for 20 hours per month for 12 months at a rate of \$24 per hour  Increase of ARCH Coord wage to \$29/hr in order to align with NYYM ARCH Coordinator rate	\$5,760  + \$,1000 (additional funds from mid-cycle adjustment)	\$6,259 for service through Aug 12
ARCH Director wages	Pay for time spent on training and monthly supervision and coordinating meetings with ARCH Director (approximately 20 hours over the course of 12 months at \$75/hour)	\$1,500	\$1,500 (payment in process)
Coordinator travel	Travel and meal reimbursement	\$1,500	\$649.82
Materials	Postage, printing, and program materials (letter to meetings; handwritten notes; readings)	\$400	\$236.48
Direct NEYM staff support	Onboarding to NEYM's email/internal communication systems and payroll/time tracking; periodic meetings with NEYM staff to identify points of integration with other NEYM events, to connect with intended audiences via NEYM communications channels, and to coordinate wider pastoral care efforts/local meeting relationships as needed. Approximately 40 hours at \$35 per hour  Increased funds to cover additional time spent by Program Director (senior staff rate of \$50/hr)	\$1,400  \$4,000 additional funds via adjustment	\$4,400
<b>Total amount granted 2022</b>		<b>\$15,560 (after adjustment and including \$3,853 previously held by NEYM)</b>	
<b>Actuals</b>		<b>\$13,045.30</b>	

\*Note: At time of submission, we are just shy of 11 months into our first cycle and therefore actuals are not final.