

## Children's Religious Education Committee Report 2017-2018

Currently, the children's program has 60 young members, with our youngest member nearing 3 years old and the oldest members at or approaching 18. CRE keeps families of students through high school age updated with emails on the happenings of our program. While we have 60 young persons on register, we have a very active 15 kids show up pretty consistently each week ranging from preschool through grade 5. We also have between 3-5 somewhat active middle schoolers. How do we define somewhat active? While they do not come every single Sunday, our middle schoolers tend to show up here and there especially when we advertise hardcore on facebook and email and they also show up for the big events such as Opening Day, Fundraisers, Christmas and Easter. Our high schoolers remain connected to our community through babysitting.

We are so lucky to have incredibly gifted teachers who help each week. At the beginning of the year, Kim and Sarah were the main lead teachers. Sarah had the 2nd through 4th grade group and Kim worked with the older kids. Annmarie had the Prek-1 children and we also often throughout the year held "All Ages" sessions where we combined groups and worked together. In the very beginning of the year, we kicked off a session of discernment in which the children learned how to come to a decision together. It is not easy to teach this to the kids and we continue to look for ways to model that it isn't a just a vote. Some of the children led a service at Chandler Hall. We hosted Quarterly Meeting Children's Religious Education Program in November learning about the Quaker stance on refugees and humanitarianism. The middle schoolers used the PYM Religious Education Curriculum, Faith and Practice, the Bible, Quaker Speak Videos, A Quaker Book of Wisdom, Lighting Candles in the Dark, Quaker books and other prose, and poetry such as John Greenleaf Whittier, and songs. They gathered together and took turns reading various texts or quotes, followed by a moment of silence, and then discussion. This was usually followed by an activity such as a challenge, craft, or song to end our time.

Mid-year, Irina and Grace joined the teaching effort. Irina made Splatter Hearts for Valentines' Day celebrating how we show love through artistic expression, Faberge Eggs for Easter and an art project called Making Beautiful Mistakes. This session had the goal of showing our kiddos that Imperfection is okay and that it is through mistakes that we grow and learn. Irina organized an ice cream social at Shady brook this Spring. Grace led a session for the children to paint pots and plant seeds for Mother's day gifts. Many of our children are relatively new to each other and we aimed this year to keep them moving and doing. This helped them work together, talk to one another and become friends. Annemarie is the teacher for our Pre-k-grade 1 group. This year's preschool through first grade group included 3-6 regular attenders. The group explored the SPICES through children's literature and play-based activities, generally targeting one SPICE each week. They also became familiar with some larger characteristics of Quaker practice, as they began each meeting together with a short period of silence, followed by discussion of a query for the day. This younger group also greatly enjoyed all-ages activities when appropriate which helped all the children get to know each other.

Several Meeting participants shared their experiences with the children this year including Jim Whitmoyer leading them in a yoga session and Norma Kaplis led a meditation.

This past year the children and teens of Newtown Friends Meeting once again supported two charities via fundraisers. The proceeds of last November's Simple Supper supported US hurricane relief via the All Hands Volunteers charity. The total raised was \$1,331. This April Lasagna Dinner proceeds went to Mercer Street Friends Summer Preschool Program, which the children and teens have supported for the past six years. The total raised was \$2,550. The total raised for the preschool program over the past six years is now at \$20,608.

CRE hosted the Christmas celebration once again teaming up with Deborah Watts. The celebration was a great success. We tried something new for Easter this year - and went candy free. We got mixed reviews on that move. Next year, we will continue to look for ways to keep the hunt fun and safe for all.

Three Bibles were presented to fourth graders this year. Sarah Armour, Billy Kaehler and Andreas Hunt each chose Bibles with the help of their families. A question was raised this year about the nature of the Bibles fourth graders should be encouraged to choose. Should the children choose adult Bibles or should they choose the Bible they feel led to read? With the guidance of Worship and Ministry, CRE will continue the tradition of allowing families to choose the Bible that will be best for their child. However, we plan to strengthen this tradition by scaffolding the experience with some history of why we present bibles and what the tradition signifies.

Three eighth graders will receive a copy of Faith and Practice this morning at the close of Meeting. Michael Mancuso, Jack Kaehler and Zoe Symogi will all be headed to high school next year. Michael will attend West Windsor High School, Jack heads to Council Rock South and Zoe begins George next fall.

CRE had \$1,331.90 sitting in an account from a donation several years ago to be used for the children. We donated that money to the new communal space outside. Peace and Service has also graciously donated proceeds from the sale of their notecards to the new space as well. The community gave \$2,070 in individual donations to the effort. We thank all the members of the playspace committee for working so hard to make a beautiful space for all to enjoy outside. Our children will most benefit next year when we have a designated space for them to play outside. The babysitters will very much enjoy the space as it will be easier to manage the little ones.

Lisa Li is rotating off of CRE this year. We will miss her so much and we thank her for all of her efforts. She has worked so hard to raise money for many different nonprofits as well as Mercer Street Friends. Barb Kiebler also rotated off officially at the beginning of this year and we miss her dearly in the nursery and thank her so much for all her help.

Our team now consists of Erica Spence-Umstead, Eileen Grant, Kim Mancuso, Grace Cicimarro, Irina Dmitrenko, Steve Bacher, and Annemarie Hindman. Newly joining us are Kelly Lake, Cynthia Vandenberg and Michele Connors.