



Friends Place Continues to Grow

By Alex Frandsen



When Friends Place opened its doors this year, it represented a fresh start in many ways. The Quaker guesthouse on Capitol Hill, formerly known as the William Penn House, had a new name, new governance thanks to the FCNL Education Fund, and upgraded facilities.

Now, with 2022 coming to a close, that promise has turned into a year filled with guests, workshops, retreats, and growth.

Friends Place Director Sarah Johnson reported that in fiscal

year 2023, which began on July 1, Friends Place hosted 33 groups. Visitors included FCNL's Advocacy Corps organizers, who gathered on Capitol Hill for a week-long training to prepare them for a year of advocacy and organizing.

In November, Friends Place also hosted attendees of FCNL's Annual Meeting and Quaker Public Policy Institute.

The guesthouse has also served as a home base for FCNL team retreats and staff workshops, further bolstering the connection

between Friends Place and its parent organization.

The reviews from visitors, according to Johnson, have largely been positive. "Friends Place continues to see about 50% of overnight groups making future reservations," she reported. Some groups have even made reservations for their trips in 2024.

The past few months have also been marked by a further solidification of Friends Place's identity as a Quaker organization. Johnson worked with staff and board members to articulate Friends Place's mission, vision, and value proposition statements.

"We created them so we would have succinct language for our values and marketing," she said. "They will be re-evaluated periodically, including as part of the FCNL strategic planning process."

The mission statement affirms Friends Place role in the hospitality and advocacy arena: "Friends Place on Capitol Hill is a welcoming space that offers hospitality centered in



◀ A group of FCNL Advocacy Corps members gather for breakfast at Friends Place during a recent training. Photo by Joe Molieri/FCNL.

peace, civic education, and justice-based advocacy for learners and leaders of all ages.”

The vision statement, meanwhile, sets a hopeful and ambitious tone: “We seek a world where every person is empowered and equipped to be a vessel of change, witness, and stewardship in their community and the world.”

And finally, the value proposition statement makes clear the unique role that Friends Place can play: “Friends Place is a Quaker guest house and learning center that offers affordable group lodging, gathering space, and civic engagement programming just blocks from the nation’s capital.”

Friends Place has also continued to provide short-term housing to migrants, who are bussed from the southern border to D.C. by the governors of Texas and Arizona.

As part of the local migrant solidarity mutual aid network, Friends Place has hosted more than 550 migrants since bussing began in April. In September, Friends Place received a grant for this work from the Office of the D.C. Attorney General.

► Sarah Johnson, Beth Volk, Joe Volk, and Bridget Moix gather during the unveiling of two new pieces of art donated by Beth. She wrote: “The large bold circles of red and blue dominate while strands of little fabric squares intersect the circles or sometimes bypass them completely. The piece is about relationships and connections.”

This ministry of hospitality has given FCNL a new window into the realities migrants face and has strengthened its advocacy for migration justice. “We have been humbled by the opportunity to offer this hospitality and to put our policy commitments into practice,” Johnson reported to the General Committee.

In addition to hosting more visitors, Friends Place is set to experience even more growth in 2023. It will host its first retreat for students leading alternative spring breaks and service-learning programs in February. The coming year will also see a continued focus on programming and curriculum development, as well as increased outreach efforts.

Friends Place will also see more artwork and illustrations hanging on its interior walls. In October,

a 100-year-old embroidery on a burlap sack given to Alfred Smaltz, a Quaker working in Russia, was unveiled by the donors, the Hulbert family.

Another artwork, created for Friends Place by Beth Volk, was recently mounted. Coming soon are photographs and illustrations depicting the history and role of the building as a Quaker witness on Capitol Hill. ■■

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The Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL), FCNL Education Fund, and Friends Place on Capitol Hill are nonprofit, nonpartisan Quaker organizations working collectively to advance peace, justice, and environmental stewardship.



Friends Place Newsletter, a publication of Friends Place on Capitol Hill, is published every six months.

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Printed using vegetableinks on FSC-certified paper in a facility that uses renewable energy.